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NEIGHBORHOOD STUDY



A JOINT REPORT OF THE  
AGASSIZ NEIGHBORHOOD STUDY COMMITTEE AND  
THE CAMBRIDGE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

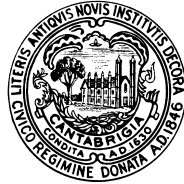
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## NEIGHBORHOOD STUDY



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### **Cambridge City Manager**

Robert W. Healy

### **Deputy City Manager**

Richard C. Rossi

### **Cambridge City Council**

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Larissa Brown  
Kevin Benjamin, Associate Member  
Florrie Darwin  
Hugh Russell  
William Tibbs  
Pamela Winters

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# *Credits*

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## **Agassiz Neighborhood Study Committee**

Amy Barad, Eustis Street

Joel Bard, Wendell Street

Deborah Galef, Hammond Street

Miriam Goldberg, Frost Street

Ross Hoffman, Wendell Street

Fred Meyer, Hammond Street

Dave Wood, Gorham Street

## **Community Development Department Project Staff**

Stuart Dash, Director of Community Planning

Rebecca Sozanski, Neighborhood Planner, Project Manager

Taha Jennings, Neighborhood Planner

Clifford Cook, Planning Information Manager

Robin Shore, Graphics Director

Venita Mathias, Former Neighborhood Planner

## **Additional Participating Staff**

Beth Rubenstein, Assistant City Manager for  
Community Development

Susan Glazer, Deputy Director for Community Development

Lester Barber, Land Use and Zoning Director

Roger Boothe, Urban Design Director

Darcy Jameson, Housing Director

Susanne Rasmussen, Environmental and Transportation  
Planning Director

Estella Johnson, Economic Development Director

Charles Sullivan, Executive Director of the  
Cambridge Historical Commission

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The Agassiz Neighborhood Study Committee and the Community Development Department would like to thank all the Agassiz residents who participated in the public forums and committee meetings.

We would like to thank the Cambridge School Department for allowing us to hold meetings at the Baldwin School (formerly the Agassiz School) and also Terry Delancey and the Agassiz Neighborhood Council for their helpful cooperation.

Cover Photo: Sacramento Field

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# *Executive Summary*

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The Agassiz Neighborhood Study Committee met between April of 2000 and December 2001. During that time, the Study Committee heard presentations from City staff, discussed issues, and held public forums. Topics under consideration included housing, land use and zoning, urban design, transportation, open space, institutional uses, and economic development. Through this process of learning, discussing, gathering feedback from the neighborhood, and working toward consensus, the Committee developed recommendations to better the neighborhood.

The recommendations put forth by the Committee are as follows:

## **AGASSIZ STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS**

### ***Housing Recommendations***

1. In order to maintain a diverse community, the City of Cambridge should explore affordable housing opportunities in the Agassiz neighborhood as they may arise.
2. The City should explore the possibility of allowing single room occupancy buildings in more residential districts and acquiring land or structures for this use.
3. The Committee recognizes that, by developing dormitories, institutions help to reduce pressure on other renters in the neighborhood. However, any new student housing construction in the Agassiz neighborhood should be low-density and compatible with the existing scale and character of the neighborhood.

4. The City of Cambridge should pursue the affordable housing funds available through the Community Preservation Act.

### ***Land Use and Zoning Recommendations***

1. Harvard University should implement the recommendations of the Hammond/ Gorham edge committee, in order to create a more friendly campus edge with open quadrangles.
2. The City's Community Development Department (CDD) should prepare an inventory of lots by size in the C-1 district showing the potential build out of lots over 6,000 square feet. This inventory should be presented to the Agassiz Neighborhood Council.
3. The Agassiz neighborhood should consider establishing a neighborhood conservation district.
4. A transition buffer zone should be created where the C2-A District abuts the C-1 District (where Lesley University abuts the neighborhood).

### ***Urban Design Recommendations***

1. New buildings should be harmonious with existing neighborhood residential aesthetics.
2. Pedestrian rights-of-way in the neighborhood should be preserved and maintained. Example: Francis Avenue to Museum Street.
3. Utility companies should be encouraged to place utilities underground whenever feasible.
4. The City should plant and maintain street trees.

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### ***Transportation Recommendations***

1. Encourage non-automobile travel.
2. Encourage Harvard and Lesley Universities to implement intra-city transportation options for their communities.
3. Encourage the MBTA to institute a bus route from Porter Square to Kendall Square along Beacon St and Hampshire St. Although this is a natural transportation corridor, no public transport goes along the length of this route.
4. Support efforts to promote system-wide improvements in MBTA bus service. Example: Harvard Square to Coolidge Corner.
5. Encourage alternative fuel transportation.
6. Support efforts to implement urban ring transit system.
7. Implement traffic calming as neighborhood streets are resurfaced.
8. Promote safer pedestrian crossings at:
  - a. Massachusetts Avenue at Garfield Street.
  - b. Oxford Street at Kirkland Street. The Committee supports Harvard's relocation of the shuttle stop to the Memorial Hall circular driveway.
  - c. The exit from the Science Center on Oxford Street.
  - d. Kirkland Street at Irving Street. The existing crosswalk does not correspond to the one at Cambridge Street and Irving Street, disrupting a logical pedestrian route. Crosswalks should be on both sides of the street.
  - e. Kirkland Street at Holden Street. At present there is only a crosswalk on the west side of the street, not the east side. Crosswalks should be on both sides of the street.
  - f. The end of Holden Street to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences park entrances.
9. Make resident only parking at night on Oxford Street from Everett to Wendell.

10. Provide Zipcar spaces in Harvard and/ or Lesley parking lots.

### ***Open Space Recommendations***

1. The City of Cambridge should work with the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) to explore the feasibility of constructing a park over the commuter rail line adjacent to the Porter Square T stop. If that fails, we recommend putting one of the many parking lots in the square underground and using the above ground area for a park. Porter Square is the location in Cambridge that is furthest from any parks, and creating a park over one of these locations is our most visionary and most expensive recommendation.
2. The City of Cambridge should pursue the open space preservation funds available through the Community Preservation Act.
3. The Committee recommends enhancing the recreational use, especially the passive recreational use, of Sacramento Field.
  - The City of Cambridge should consider renaming Sacramento Field to Sacramento Park.
  - New signage should be placed at the main entrance to Sacramento Field on Sacramento Street.
  - The recently re-opened second public access route to Sacramento Field/Park should be maintained.
4. Encourage the closing of Oxford Street for community celebrations.
5. Encourage prompt removal of all graffiti by property owners - including City street signs and U.S. mailboxes.
6. Encourage the Agassiz Neighborhood Council to continue its tree-sponsorship program.
7. Encourage residents to take advantage of the City's sidewalk tree program.

### ***Institutional Recommendations***

1. In conjunction with their residential projects, Harvard and Lesley should consider including housing for their hourly-wage employees.

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2. Harvard and Lesley should inform Cambridge residents of upcoming events open to the public.

#### *Lesley University*

1. The University should improve the landscaping at the Oxford Street side of 47 Oxford Street.
2. Lesley should work with a neighborhood committee to discuss development issues with Agassiz.

#### *Harvard University*

*Note that Harvard University's proposals for the North Yard area were made public after the neighborhood study process for the Agassiz neighborhood was nearly complete. While this report recognizes the North Yard proposals, and provides recommendations regarding Harvard University, it does not offer an exhaustive review and analysis of the proposals or their effects on the neighborhood.*

1. As the University considers the development of the North Yard, the Committee recommends the formation of a committee to work with Harvard on the issues of:
  - Density, height and open space of proposed development;
  - Construction impacts;
  - Cumulative impact of traffic;
  - Preserving neighborhood character and scale;
  - Preserving as much public use and space open to public use as possible;
  - Exploring options to reduce the traffic from the proposed new Harvard garage exiting onto Oxford Street, including:
    - a) Making Everett two-way to accommodate ingress and egress.
    - b) Making Divinity Way an entrance or exit for garage traffic.
    - c) Using Francis/Bryant Street as entrance or exit for garage traffic.
    - d) Restricting parking on Oxford Street between Everett and Wendell at peak vehicle hours.

2. The local Harvard museums should be requested to offer free admission to Cambridge residents and school groups.
3. The Committee supports Harvard's objective to extend the pattern of publicly accessible quadrangles to the neighborhood boundaries.
4. The City of Cambridge should encourage Harvard University to incorporate publicly accessible open space on Oxford Street/Divinity school property.
5. The Committee requests that Harvard University landscape the existing parking lot on Oxford Street once underground parking is constructed.
6. The Committee recommends that Harvard move the existing shuttle bus location, as both shuttle buses and tour buses clog the Oxford and Kirkland Streets intersection.
7. All of the gates at the Academy of Arts and Sciences should remain open during posted hours.
8. Harvard Law School should involve the neighborhood early in its planning process.

#### ***Economic Development Recommendations***

1. The Committee encourages the creation of pedestrian-friendly, neighborhood-oriented uses of commercial spaces along Massachusetts Avenue and throughout the Agassiz neighborhood.
2. The City should develop a formalized plan to communicate with the Agassiz Neighborhood Council about types of new businesses that would be useful in the neighborhood. Example: Currently, a bakery is needed in the neighborhood.
3. The Committee supports Harvard's established practice of reduced rents to diverse retail tenants.